OPINION

BY MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

Challenges to states

SOME 70 sovereign states existed before World War II. Today, some 195 are UN member states. Globalisation, modern technology, climate change, political instability, social media and changing values pose challenges to states. The first two increased the speed of interactions but also limited states' ability to control their own economy, with institutions like FATF expecting adherence to set rules. Climate change displaces people, disrupts food security and affects infrastructure and livelihoods. It challenges state capacity. In 2022, Pakistan, Belize and Italy were ranked by the Climate Risk Index as the most affected by extreme weather. Globally, from 1993 to 2022, extreme weather led to $4.2 trillion in losses.

Post-9/11, some states face cross-border terrorism and insurgencies, cross-border training camps, spill-over of regional violence, refugee influx, parallel governance structures set up by violent non-state actors, arms and human trafficking. In poorly governed areas, VNSAs block service delivery by attacking government installations and disrupting anti-polio drives. Extremists spread misinformation via social media to destabilise societies and weaken democratic processes. Low media literacy prevents people from distinguishing between false and real news, making it tough for states to preserve digital freedoms. Limited cybercrime investigation capacity and weak laws erode trust.

Stakeholder collaboration, rooted in transparency, education and respect for rights, may help. States can respond to fake news through transparency laws and obligate platforms to remove harmful content. Awareness drives can restrict fake news. Collaboration with social media platforms and AI use can help detect misinformation networks. Finland introduced a 'fact-checking task force' to monitor and debunk fake news in real-time, which works with media on verifying information. Cyberspace is a new sphere of power, which no state can effectively police on its own, with the dark web and encrypted platforms posing security threats.

States not only face military threats but also narrative warfare. Countering narratives and ensuring the free information flow gives intelligentsia scope to counter anti-state narratives. Erosion of trust in institutions increases public discontent with bureaucracy. Low allocations for health exposes gaps. A growing pensioner population has increased the state's financial burden. Not addressing such issues may lead to violent movements. Ideological polarisation hinders consensus building and policymaking.

Non-traditional security threats are transnational, often non-military, and threaten sovereignty. States face VNSA terrorism, internal conflict and geopolitical rivalry, negatively impacting internal security. Once confined to borders, conflicts are now multidimensional and non-traditional with VNSAs operating in cyber and media space too. Fake news creates ideological battlefields inside nations where identity, political and economic inequalities and religion are misused to weaken governance. Conflict has transitioned from the battlefield to the mind, from borders to communities.

Ungoverned spaces are no longer limited to urban/rural areas but include maritime and cyberspace. States with weak law enforcement face VNSA challenges, making such areas potential sanctuaries for VNSAs. Cybercrime, data breach and digital espionage compromise sovereignty and trust. Online radicalisation enables lone wolves to strike, while the internet provides space for information warfare. Transnational organised crime weakens the rule of law and encourages corruption. Refugees and IDPs create humanitarian and security challenges.

> Cyberspace is the new sphere of power.

Improved governance needs socio-political, economic and military approaches with public support to socially isolate militants who fill ungoverned spaces. In this context, Fata's merger was a positive step. Community engagement and promoting local governance through tribal and religious leaders help peacebuilding. Cross-border cooperation, including CT operations and technology can monitor ungoverned areas. Policing cybersecurity and capacity building of police, judiciary and civil services are priorities. Few states have a plan like Colombia's Patriota plan based on an integrated governance and development approach where the military in remote areas has security functions to uproot guerrillas and engage in infrastructure development. In militancy- and insurgency-infested areas Pakistan can modify such a plan to suit local needs with government and public support.

Combating cyberspace challenges needs cooperation, regulation and preparedness, which necessitates implementation of cyber laws and institution building and building digital capacity while balancing security with digital freedom. ■

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BY ZARRAR KHUHRO

Almighty algorithms

YOU may have heard of Zohran Mamdani, the charismatic 34-year-old mayor of New York. You may even envy him just a little bit, especially when your parents ask you exactly what you achieved at that stage in your life. But you don't actually know Mamdani, and you certainly don't know about the 'Pakistani radical Marxist political movement' that helped him inveigle his way into the hearts of millions of New Yorkers and into the city halls of powers.

As Pakistanis you may be shocked to know we have an effective Marxist political movement at all, let alone a radical one, but that's because the *New York Post* knows better than you do. What is the *New York Post*, you may ask? Well, it's a highly pro-Israel, pro-Zionist tabloid/ rag published out of New York which has, over the past two years of the ongoing Palestinian genocide, dedicated cover after cover to doxxing and demonising every single pro-Palestinian activist and maligning every pro-Palestinian protest they could find space for in their pages. Unsurprisingly, they also repeatedly targeted Mamdani during his mayoral campaign and are continuing to do so now that he is mayor-elect. In this process, they found a fantastic new angle of attack by somehow tying Mamdani's win to the efforts of Pakistan's Haqooq-i-Khalq party, which was founded by Ammar Ali Jan and Farooq Tariq.

No one was more surprised by this than Pakistani leftists, who clearly had no idea just how influential they are, given that the Haqooq-i-Khalq only contested one MPA seat in Pakistan, garnering some 1,600 votes. But that's all right, says Ammar Ali Jan, because after all their real target was New York and not Lahore's PP-160.

In the spirit of solidarity, this creeping red coup was celebrated on X by none other than the communist don Taimur Rehman who, while posting a picture of himself embracing Mamdani, wrote: "'Inshallah, the secret network of Pakistani Marxists will soon rule the world." You may find this to be an ideologically impure statement, but then consider that Mamdani is somehow also a radical communist as well as a radical jihadi, as per the *NY Post* and its allies.

As usual someone asked Grok what on earth Taimur meant and if the picture was real and Grok confirmed both that "groups like Laal provided organisational support for Mamdani's win through voter mobilisation", and also confirmed that the bromantic picture posted by Rehman seemed genuine. Case closed. The AI gods had spoken. Except, Grok was mistaken: the picture itself had been created by Taimur using the Gemini AI, the logo of which is visible in the image.

As for Mamdani's Red Tide, what Grok based its 'opinion' on was the report published by the *NY Post*, and possibly tweets that reproduced the same. That's what AI does: it regurgitates info — right or wrong — that is found online and often substitutes volume for verification and confidence for certainty. In effect, if enough social media posts, websites and videos say it, AI generally considers it to be true. In classic computer science terms this is what was referred to as GIGO: 'garbage in, garbage out.' Simply put, this means that if flawed, biased or poor-quality data is fed to an algorithm the resulting output will also be flawed, regardless of how sophisticated that algorithm or system may be.

Case in point: when Microsoft launched its 'Tay' Twitter chatbot in 2016, its aim was "to engage and entertain people where they connect with each other online through casual and playful conversation". Targeted at 18-24-year-olds in the US, Microsoft proudly declared: "'The more you chat with Tay the smarter she gets."

> If an algorithm is fed flawed data the output will be flawed too.

Twitter took up the challenge and bombarded Tay with so much extremist and racist content that, within 16 hours of its launch, Tay turned into a virtual Nazi.

Granted, these were the early days of AI, but now this process has a specific term: data poisoning. This is the deliberate seeding of biased, false and even malicious information with the aim of corrupting the dataset on which the AI is being trained.

Its already happening, and you may not even have noticed: in October this year the US website *Responsible Statecraft* reported that Israel had signed a $6 million contract with an American company "to train ChatGPT to be more pro-Israel" by flooding the internet with pro-Israeli narratives (videos, TikToks, podcasts, etc) while also relying on search engine optimisation to ensure that the said content is more visible, and thus more likely to be 'consumed' by AI.

In an age where we are gleefully outsourcing our intelligence to machines, we need to be aware that AI is not the Almighty, it is an algorithm. To paraphrase Frank Herbert, we could give over our thinking to machines in the hope that it would free us, but it may just allow other men with machines to enslave us. ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

Friendly ties with all

RAWALPINDI: Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has said that Pakistan is pursuing a policy of friendship and peaceful co-existence with all countries. In an interview with … "Yomiyuri Shimbun", Tokyo, in Rawalpindi … the Prime Minister said that Pakistan believes in developing friendly relations with the Super Powers without getting involved in their problems… . Pakistan, he said, has very brotherly relations with Iran, very good relations with the Persian Gulf States, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Pakistan was also normalising her relations with India. With Bangladesh our relations have been restored to normal… . On the whole … Pakistan is making its contribution to the stabilisation of the situation in this region.

In reply to a question on political crises in India and Bangladesh, the [PM] said that Pakistan had nothing to do with the arrangements with India nor was she … connected with the changes in Bangladesh. He said we want good relations with India. We have the Simla agreement and we are prepared to … settle our problems and our differences. Referring to Bangladesh … he said there is a special feeling for Bangladesh.

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

'Quit Nile Valley'

CAIRO: The Egyptian Government demanded on Thursday [Nov 16] before a wildly cheering Parliament that Britain should get out of the Suez Canal Zone and the Sudan immediately. In an advance notice to Britain the Government sought cancellation of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and unity of the Nile Valley under the Egyptian Crown. In a speech read for him at the State opening of Parliament, King Farouk said: "My Government considers the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty has ceased to be a suitable basis for Anglo-Egyptian relations."

When his Government was called to power …. it undertook to … secure evacuation of foreign troops from the Nile Valley and to secure its unity under the Egyptian Crown. It was hoped adequate proposals to conciliate these viewpoints would … be received. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, according to news agencies in London,] Britain … rejected Egypt's demands for unification of Nile Valley, Sudan under the Egyptian Crown and diplomatic quarters said it would also turn down Egypt's request for immediate evacuation of the Suez Canal base. … A spokesman of the Foreign Office … said … Britain desired solution of "complete equality and full sovereignty inspired by mutual confidence".

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Trump's denial of science hurts US

THE official absence of the United States from the 30th edition of the Conference of the Parties (COP30) Climate Summit in Brazil is more than a diplomatic misstep; it is a disgraceful abandonment of global responsibility. This has been openly acknowledged by Democratic leaders in Washington, who described the empty American chair as "a historic humiliation for the United States".

At a press conference held on the same day the summit opened, leaders lamented that the US had "vacated its seat at the head table", leaving the world's most important climate forum without the presence of the leader of the world, which also happens to be the largest historical emitter. President Donald Trump's decision to abstain reflected not merely neglect, but a deeper and dangerous rejection of science, consensus and global leadership.

Trump's worldview on climate change remains skewed, unscientific and rooted in denial. He has repeatedly dismissed climate science as 'nonsense', called global warming a 'hoax', and ridiculed decades of research, including that by prestigious American institutions.

The US administration has reversed environmental regulations faster than any in modern history, rolling back more than 125 climate and pollution safeguards, reopening federal lands for oil and gas drilling, dismantling the Clean Power Plan, slashing environmental budgets, and restricting renewable energy incentives. The result is a world power stepping backward as the rest of the world steps forward. Trump's absence is especially alarming because the climate crisis is intensifying far faster than predictions.

America's withdrawal is part of a broader trend: the retreat of US leadership across global institutions. The same pattern has occurred at various forums where American influence has diminished due to policies seen as negative, confrontational, or aligned with narrow private interests instead of global wellbeing.

Washington is increasingly outvoted, sidelined or isolated — not because America lacks power, but because it has chosen to apply that power in ways that contradict scientific consensus and international expectations.

Trump continues to push policies that drag America further backwards. While China will sell over 11 million electric vehicles (EVs) in 2025, the US faces stagnation due to inconsistent policies. The same is the case with advancements in the renewable energy projects.

Inside the US, powerful voices are now rising in protest. Scientists, environmental organisations, governors, mayors, universities and corporate leaders have condemned the administration's retreat. Photos of the empty US seat in the main plenary hall at COP30 went viral worldwide, symbolising a superpower turning its back on humanity.

The US must rethink its direction before it gets too late. It must return to clean energy innovation, rebuild institutional capacity, train its workforce for the green economy, and reclaim its leadership at COP and across world bodies. Leadership lost today will not be easily regained. The world is moving forward at a high speed, and the US cannot afford to be left behind.

Qamar Bashir
Islamabad

Unfair policies

THE administration of the Government College University (GCU) in Lahore has been causing immense hardship to the students enrolled there, making their academic lives one big mess with rules and regulations that have nothing to do with the quality of the studies.

For instance, when students fail to clear a course, they have to seek readmission. After readmission, such students are required to repeat not only the failed courses, but also those with grades below B- at the graduate level and below C+ at the undergraduate level. Why should students be compelled to bear the financial and academic burden of retaking the courses they have already passed?

More concerning is the rule that if students fail again, they are permanently dropped from the university roll. In such cases, years of hard work, financial resources, and valuable time are wasted. Sadly, around a hundred students every year are deprived of their degrees at the institution due to such rigid policies. It is heart-breaking to see students and their parents pleading before administrators, only to be told that nothing can be done.

No other university in Pakistan — whether government or private — imposes such harsh regulations. Most, in fact, follow comparatively lenient policies in line with the relevant guidelines issued from time to time by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The institutional administration must constitute a committee to review all such unfair rules, and bring them in line with HEC policies. Such reforms are needed to safeguard the future of our students.

Malik Hashir Awan
Lahore

Antibiotic resistance

THE excessive use and over-the-counter (OTC) sale of antibiotics have pushed Pakistan into a dangerously worsening crisis of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Common infections that were once easily treatable with antibiotics have now become increasingly difficult to cure. For several illnesses, such as cold, flu, dengue and malaria, antibiotics are not needed, but they are often prescribed. On the other hand, many patients continue to engage in self-medication.

Drug-resistant bacteria are spreading rapidly in hospitals across Pakistan, making the treatment of various diseases increasingly difficult. Infections that once responded to simple antibiotics now require higher dose or stronger last-resort drugs. Common antibiotics are losing their effectiveness against many bacteria.

There are countless cases of unnecessary antibiotic use. Even in hospitals, the pressure to treat resistant bacteria often leads to overuse of drugs, which, in turn, strengthens these microbes over time. When hospitals fail to strictly follow infection control measures, resistant germs spread quickly, making treatment more complicated and increasing rates of illness and death.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), microbial resistance is spreading much faster than the development of new antibiotics. Unfortunately, the situation is worse in Pakistan due to weak infection control practices, especially in public hospitals and rural health centres that lack both staff and financial resources.

Hand hygiene is one of the simplest yet most effective ways to prevent resistance against antimicrobes. Pakistan needs to educate healthcare workers — particularly those at the community level — about hygiene and infection prevention practices. Isolating patients with resistant infections, properly disinfecting medical equipment and bedding, and maintaining strict sanitation standards are essential to reduce cross-contamination.

Pakistan's AMR action plan must focus heavily on raising public awareness. Doctors, pharmacists and people need to understand how the misuse of antibiotics can render treatments ineffective. The government must establish strong infection control committees in every hospital and enforce rigorous hygiene standards.

It should strictly prohibit the sale of antibiotics without a valid prescription. If current trends continue, many common infections in Pakistan could become untreatable, ushering in a post-antibiotic era.

Muhammad Faizan Ali
Karachi

Dumping site

RIGHT opposite Defence View, across Shaheed-i-Millat Road, the Karachi Municipal Corporation (KMC) has turned a large open area into a dumping site. Initially, it was used only for construction and demolition (C&D) waste — mainly debris from demolished buildings — which caused limited disturbance. However, in recent months, the site has increasingly been used for municipal waste disposal, creating severe environmental and health concerns.

Thousands of commuters use this route daily, and a large number of students attend nearby educational institutions. The constant stench from the waste has made the area almost unbearable for residents, pedestrians and students alike. Research has proven that foul odour contributes to stress, anxiety and a decline in overall quality of life. Prolonged exposure can also cause headaches, nausea and irritation of the eyes, nose and throat.

To make matters worse, the authorities have reportedly begun burning the garbage, often from evening until the next morning, producing dense clouds of smoke that blanket the surrounding areas. This practice adds to Karachi's worsening air quality, which already ranks among the most polluted in the world.

It is necessary for the authorities concerned to take immediate notice of this serious environmental hazard. Proper waste management and relocation of the dumping site away from residential and educational areas are essential steps to protect public health, and to ensure a cleaner environment for the people.

M. Essa Channa
Karachi

▶ **MENTAL HEALTH:** Depression, anxiety and emotional exhaustion have become widespread, yet conversations around mental wellbeing remain limited due to deep-rooted social stigma. The pressure to excel academically, financial insecurity, and constant comparisons have created an environment of never-ending stress. Young people tend to often find themselves overwhelmed, but hesitate to seek help for fear of being misunderstood or judged. Unfortunately, mental health services in educational institutions are nearly non-existent, and trained counsellors remain a rarity. Schools, universities and workplaces should appoint qualified counsellors and introduce awareness programmes promoting psychological resilience. Moreover, national campaigns can help dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health therapy and emotional expression.
Nouman Mazhar Butt
Fatehjang

▶ **THE LEGAL CULTURE:** This is with reference to the article 'Litigants non grata' (Nov 3). In Pakistan, prosecutors work under the influence of the executive branch, making them vulnerable to political pressure. Without proper independence, the idea of fair and impartial prosecution will remain out of reach. The state itself often behaves like a vexatious litigant, filing unnecessary appeals and refusing to accept lawful decisions. This practice adds hundreds of pointless cases to an already overburdened system. What Pakistan needs at the moment is real institutional reforms which should include more independence for prosecutors, stronger judicial powers to stop frivolous cases, and a change in legal culture that values resolution over delay.
Tipu Saeed Khan
Karachi

NEW YORK CITY MAYOR: Zohran Mamdani's election as the mayor of New York City (NYC) makes him the first Muslim and the first South Asian to hold that office. He is the first person born outside the United States to be elected mayor. His election is a powerful testament to the inclusivity and democratic values.
Aqsa Shoaib
Karachi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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